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## THE FUNCTIONS OF A STATE HISTORY.

THE recent "uniform text-book law" has led to the publication of two histories of Tennessee for use as text-books in the public schools of the State.<sup>1</sup> Three questions at once present themselves: Are they good text-books? Are they trustworthy histories? What should be the scope and plan of a State history?

Prof. McGee's book is a small, illustrated volume, chronologically arranged, addressed "To the Girls and Boys of Tennessee," and written in a fairly acceptable literary style, adapted to their comprehension. Mechanically speaking, the book is well made; and from the historical point of view the narrative commends itself, save in rare passages, as simple, truthful, fair, and complete, though necessarily not full and thorough.

One or two points deserve public criticism. The name of the Spanish Governor, "Miro," is used without comment for the district which by custom and official sanction has been designated "Mero." The description of the Tennessee Centennial Exposition is beneath the dignity of the book. In part it is silly and detracts from the high plane of æsthetic and historic merit upon which that enterprise was conceived and executed, and in part it is inadequate. Nowhere has the author a word upon the historic style of architecture, pure Greek and colonial, exemplified in the chief buildings; and though the Exposition is the event chosen to furnish the

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<sup>1</sup>"A History of Tennessee, from 1663 to 1900," for Use in Schools, by G. R. McGee, Principal of College Street School, Jackson, Tenn., pp. 278 and xxxix. The American Book Company, Cincinnati.

"History of Tennessee: Its People and Its Institutions." By William Robertson Garrett, A.M., Ph.D., Professor of American History and Dean of the Peabody Normal College, and Editor of the *American Historical Magazine*, and Albert Virgil Goodpasture, A.M., formerly Clerk of the Supreme Court of Tennessee, pp. 351. Brandon Printing Company, Nashville, Tenn.

frontispiece, the view selected is one in which the noblest building does not appear. But such faults can be easily remedied.

The general merits of the book are very well illustrated by the manner in which the author presents the delicate question of the Nickojack (another spelling is Nickajack) expedition, which was undertaken in 1794 by Gen. James Robertson, against the orders of his superiors. "Finally," says McGee in his narrative, "the patience of Robertson and of every one else came to an end, and they determined to disobey their rulers and give the Creeks and Chickamaugas a taste of Sevier's methods with the Cherokees." "When the report of the expedition reached the ears of the officials, there was a great stir. The Secretary of War wrote a severe letter to Gov. Blount, and Gov. Blount wrote a stinging reproof to Gen. Robertson, and Gen. Robertson wrote a sharp reply, in which he said, in effect, that he and the Cumberland people did not intend to sit still and bescalped by the Indians while the officials were passing compliments with the Spaniards; and if they did not like his way of doing, they might get some one else to serve as brigadier general. But he was too valuable a man to dismiss from office, and here the matter ended. The Indian wars in Middle Tennessee also ended, except a few raids of little importance, though very annoying."

Here every essential fact is stated, and no integral phase of the incident is suppressed or discolored. Yet every question which a keen-minded child could ask is discreetly answered. The people of the Cumberland settlements reverted temporarily to the "original right of revolution," and their conduct must be judged by revolutionary and not by legal standards.

Garrett and Goodpasture's book contains fully a third more material than McGee's, is fuller of details (perhaps too full), and must be put into the hands of older pupils. It is scrupulously accurate in the statement of facts; but in point of literary finish and mechanical execution there is much to be desired. A good style and an artistic book can do much to

cultivate the taste of the pupil and reduce the tedium of his tasks.

So far as the matter is concerned it must be duly recognized that the authors have made an authoritative compendium of Tennessee history in a small compass and in a form fairly convenient for reference. They have made accessible all that is valuable in Haywood, Ramsay and Phelan; besides correcting some errors and adding some new material. No one is better informed than they upon the subjects of public lands and Indian cessions. The new maps illustrating these subjects and the annotated catalogue of Indian treaties are material contributions to the history of the State, though, as the authors confess, they would be of questionable propriety in a book intended merely for a text-book.

But there is something radically wrong with the method of presentation which they have adopted. The story of the period after 1820, in particular, is little more than a chronological catalogue of events and a series of biographical sketches. There is no unity of conception, and there is no development of thought. One instance will illustrate:

The constitution of 1796 made the Governor and Legislature elective by popular vote, and the other officers appointive. The judiciary was the creature of the Legislature, and was without the modern constitutional guarantees of independence. The bulk of the power was placed in the hands of a Legislature that was frequently renewed, and only therein lay the trusted safeguard to popular liberty. In this respect the constitution resembled the average constitution of that period. But after a while a democratizing spirit spread abroad throughout the land, as Bryce and others have pointed out. The people of Tennessee, as of other States, sought to control public affairs more directly and to safeguard their rights by making the departments of government quite independent of each other and by filling the offices, local and general, by direct popular election.

The constitution of 1796 also provided that no hundred acres of land should be taxed more than any other hundred; nor any town lot or free poll more than a hundred acres,

nor slave poll more than two hundred. But after a while the influence of the land speculators began to wane, the parcels of land began to differentiate in value, and there was relatively more personal property.

The constitution of 1834 registers the fact that both movements had grown strong enough at that time to secure a revision of the outgrown and hence inequitable and absurd provisions of the old constitution. But the democratizing movement did not reach its climax until the judges of the Supreme Court in 1853 were made elective by popular vote for terms of eight years; and it was not until the constitution of 1870 was adopted that "all" property, without distinction, was made taxable at its value. These changes are along a determinable line, methodical, of the nature of a growth, and hence organic; but the narrative before us fails to make it clear.

It is truly a difficult problem to handle the details of history wisely. They number a thousand and one. Each one, by itself considered, seems to deserve a place in some permanent accessible record; while space and literary style often forbid. How shall the selection be made? There seems to be a reasonable rule, but it is much easier to state this rule than to apply it. Some details of time, place, and circumstance are necessary as pegs upon which to hang the narrative; there must be enough to give the narrative strength and firmness, but more than enough are useless or worse. Some details are needed to give the lights and shades to the word picture which the historian has created and would present; but too many will spoil the effect. Some details are necessary to illustrate a proposition or demonstrate a law. However great the mass of material which the author has had to examine, however laborious his task in formulating his proposition or testing his rule, he must present it in the simplest and briefest way possible. He must have something definite to say, which is the product of his investigations and the fruit of his meditations; and this he must say succinctly, clearly and strongly.

The contrast between two selected passages will illustrate.

Few passages in either book excel those chapters in which the latter describes the campaigns of the civil war in Tennessee. These movements were carried out on a large scale; yet there was an underlying plan, and the authors succeed in making it very plain and simple. In this case others had elaborated the story which it became their function to epitomize. The reconstruction period, on the other hand, is a comparatively unworked field. They make no statement concerning it to which exception need be taken in point of taste or truth; and the details they give are not unwelcome. But their facts are undigested, and so seem pointless. Their facts should be so grouped as to illustrate some pregnant sentences like these from McGee's story of the same period. The disfranchisement of those who had taken part in the war on the side of the South, says McGee, "placed the control of the State in the hands of the minority of the people." "Those who were not allowed to vote became indignant and defiant, and opposed and embarrassed the State government in every possible way." The reconstruction period "exhibited in its details almost every phase of the stormiest revolutionary tendencies, and the vilest political and personal animosities." The turning point came after Brownlow had been elected to the United States Senate and Senter, who was filling out the gubernatorial term, had become a candidate for election to that office before the people. "Senter now had the same power that Brownlow had in 1867, and he used it to have himself elected. He ordered the election commissioners to issue certificates, or permits to vote, to all actual citizens of the State, . . . and the State government was again in the hands of officers elected by a majority of all the people." What a commentary these sentences are upon the deeds of that passionate period; deeds, many of which were criminal and few of which have escaped misrepresentation and *ex parte* condemnation!

The problem of handling details affects every historian and must be settled by each according to the subject, scope, and purpose of his allotted task. Still another question confronts the State historian. He is perplexed to draw the right line

between State and national topics. For example, how much space should be allotted to the war of 1812-15 in a history of the State of Tennessee? This war was national, and the question resolves itself into another: How does the part which Tennessee and Tennesseans contributed to the prosecution of this war compare in interest and importance with other incidents which claim consideration in a history of the State? How far was she involved in the war, and what did she contribute?

Though the war was not fought within her borders, she contributed the services of her most famous son, whose claims to military greatness rest largely upon his achievements at this time. It is really quite easy to demonstrate his military genius by his conduct in the field, and it should be done. Tennessee also contributed soldiers, volunteers under act of the national Congress and militia levied under act of the Legislature and mustered into the service of the United States. These soldiers were the victors of New Orleans, but also the mutineers of Fort Strother. Of course the truth must be made plain, whether the troops are vindicated or not. But it would seem that the line along which the truth may most successfully be sought and along which vindication is most likely to be found is in the examination of the systems of national volunteering and of the State militia then in vogue. Neither of these institutions is treated in either book before us. To be sure one is a national institution and the other was common to all States. But (1) they concern Tennessee affairs very intimately; (2) no one can expect to appreciate the problem in Tennessee fully unless he is reasonably familiar with the experience of other States and sections with the same institution; and (3) finally, also, it is due the reader that he should know how far Tennessee's experience is typical and how far peculiar.

There is something inspiring in the thought of a community of industrious freemen who at first alarm leave their vocations, form in martial array, defend their homes and institutions, and, immediately disbanding, return to the enjoyment of the liberties they have vindicated. Against the sav-

ages the militia system had generally been successful. Although there was occasional criticism, it is rather doubtful whether the pioneers would have endured a more rigorous military discipline. But it had its weak side, which was occasionally brought to notice and which infected also the volunteer system. Too much power lay with the rank and file. The officers, the equals of the men in peace, led them by their personal influence rather than by their authority as commanders; and the men were habituated to short terms of service. Satisfied to have scotched the snake, the soldiers were ready to disband, lacking the spirit of self-sacrifice, the military foresight, and the discipline necessary to make the effort to kill it and deliver themselves once for all from its dangers.

In the case before us, certain men who had volunteered for "one year in two" had been rendezvoused at Nashville on December 10, 1812. They made the expedition to Natchez and, returning by the Natchez Trace, had been "dismissed" by Jackson at Columbia in February, 1813. In the autumn, they were called out again by Jackson for the Creek campaign. The Indians were quickly defeated but not subdued, and the fateful date, December 10, was approaching. Would their term of service expire on that date? Or were they bound to serve three hundred and sixty-five days under arms, with the privilege of discharge not later than December 10, 1814? The militia also had been called out to assist in this campaign. But the length of service was not specified in the act; was it therefore for the traditional three months or for the war? The troops, suffering from lack of supplies and other hardships, interpreting the terms of enlistment in their own favor and ill brooking discipline, found themselves confronted by a soldier gifted with the military sagacity to see that the campaign must be continued at almost any cost. Further, he was possessed of a firmness of character that under untoward circumstances became obstinacy and of a personal courage that sometimes led to foolhardy acts. In this case that "desperate courage," that sometimes "makes one a majority" triumphed, and the



troops were held, at least until recruits could be sent up; and the power of the Creeks was forever broken. Under a better system the men could not so easily have exposed themselves to the stigma of mutiny; under a better system the commander would not have had either opportunity or need to bully his troops; while under a less firm and sagacious commander the campaign would have been abandoned and the Creeks would have remained as serious a menace as ever.

This may throw some light upon the inquiry how far the State historian may be justified in branching out into the domain of sectional or national history. From another point of view the inquiry may be raised: How far may we look to the State historian to supplement national history? Scarcely any question can be raised in pioneer history, in economic history, in politics, constitutional law, religion, or education, which is peculiar to a locality. With rare exceptions the problems are universal, the experiences are common, differing from place to place only in details. No national history of less than encyclopedic dimensions could treat every such question adequately. The ordinary national history, in order not to be unreasonably voluminous, must limit itself to a mere mention of the common points of each problem; which is very unsatisfactory. It is inadequate, and it therefore seems superficial. May it not properly be expected of the history of particular States to discuss such questions in detail, according to their local peculiarities? But if so, it must all the while be remembered that they have more than a local importance. They must be conceived by the investigator as general problems which by necessity he can investigate only in part, but to the solution of which he must bring his geographical quota.

Let us illustrate: The second history of Tennessee before us makes mention of the first bank, the first turnpike, the first railroad to be incorporated. Within limits the effort to enumerate "first" events in a series is unexceptionable; but if carried too far, the effect is to misplace historical emphasis. In particular, the authors neglect the opportunity to show what a tremendous institution the private corporation

chartered by the State has become. The national government has chartered a great system of banks and an occasional transportation company. But the great industrial monopolies, which are so conspicuous a topic in politics of late, and which offer some very serious problems in statesmanship, have grown great and threatening under the protection of State charters. What has Tennessee done to promote the growth of private corporations? What has she done toward the regulation of them? Can the States, as such, regulate them, or must the national government undertake it for all corporations doing an interstate business, as it has already undertaken the regulation of the railroads? Is the function of the State, in comparison with that of the national government, growing relatively less in spite of us? Such questions are not altogether speculative or academic, nor are they out of place in a book intended to educate intelligent citizens or to give the history of the State as an integral part of the nation.

Again, in this work Tennessee's entrance into the sisterhood of States is narrated fully and succinctly; but the event had a broader constitutional bearing than the authors indicate. "Relying upon the compact under which they had become a territory of the United States," the people of Tennessee "abandoned forever their condition of tutelage, and constituted themselves an independent people, demanding admission to the Union as a matter of contract right, with a firm purpose to continue as an independent State until that right should be recognized." Gov. Blount, holding office by federal appointment as governor of the "Territory South of the River Ohio," forwarded the constitution of Tennessee to Mr. Pickering, Secretary of State, and "notified him that when the General Assembly of Tennessee should meet on the twenty-eighth of March, the temporary government would cease;" and so it did. The State government was inaugurated in its place before the matter could be presented to Congress in any form. These facts, fully borne out by the evidence, are eloquent witnesses to the constitutional views of the Tennesseans of that time; and of Congress too, for the admis-

sion of Tennessee was by a party vote, the Federalists opposing. Was it not an earnest of the attitude which the Republicans would take toward the States when they should come into power? But things turned out differently, and the effect of the precedent was lost. The next Territories to seek admission—Ohio (1802), Louisiana (1812), Indiana (1816), Mississippi (1817), Illinois (1818), Alabama (1819), Missouri (1821), etc.—all humbly petitioned Congress to enable them to hold a constitutional convention. The occasion for this significant change in constitutional practice was, among other things, the simple one of self-interest. It was not for the interest of these Territories to wait and demand admission as a right when the terms of the compact were fulfilled, but to seek admission as a favor sooner, and especially to secure the donation of land which Congress seemed willing to confer.

Still again, after our authors have reached the Jacksonian period, when the domination of national parties began to be prominently felt in State politics, the narrative becomes monotonous. There does not seem to be much to say except that after another two years another State election was fought out largely on national issues, and the party in power, almost as a rule, lost. Yet these very prosy facts raise a very important, not to say vital, question of State government. Is it inevitable that the national should dominate the State politics? A survey of the history of Tennessee and her sister States shows that, as a rule and save in cases that are exceptional, national politics have universally and uniformly dominated. It is not difficult to infer that a fact thus universal is inevitable.

But be that as it may, we can take the fact as it stands and inquire into some of the consequences. One result is the neglect of State affairs. People overlook them or count them trivial, having their attention absorbed in a broader and more important field, forsooth. Secondly, consolidation goes on apace; the parts of the nation grow small, and the whole grows relatively large in popular estimation; the integral character of the State is dwarfed and stunted by the silent practice of its own citizens. What is to be the outcome? Are these

local State concerns to be made the football of national politics without protest? Or can there be a return to the pristine simplicity of State politics? Must the national government encroach more and more upon the sphere of the State because the State is failing to care for some things which the public cannot permit to be neglected? Or must the national government interfere because the great uniform interests of a consolidated public demand uniformity where the States, if they meddled, would inject confusion? Some think the tendency toward consolidation wise in itself. Others may simply think it so strong that the only course is to accommodate ourselves to it as best we may. Few are so blind to the facts as to think that the States can ever again hold the relative importance in our system of constitutional law and government that they once held without eliminating from our civilization some of the things with which we should regret to part. So do the eternal ages deal with the institutions of man's proposing.

But let these instances suffice for specific criticism. Enough has probably been said to suggest what we may reasonably ask of a State historian, and to show the chief merits and demerits of these books. McGee's book is so evidently adapted to the capacities of younger pupils that this feature must stand forth as a point of excellence together with its general accuracy, and it will escape the test of the more pretentious standards of judgment. But Garrett and Goodpasture's book is the latest, most accessible, most comprehensive, and most accurate history of the State, and the authors must accept responsibility for it as such. As a text-book for the advanced grades, and as a general history of the State, its chief excellences are the number and the accuracy of the facts which it records. Its defects are in literary style, historical perspective, and historical interpretation.

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